AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-24. (Canceled)

25.   (Currently Amended) A method for processing mailpieces having graphic information located on a surface of a mailpiece comprising:

ascertaining the graphic information;

associating the mailpiece with a mailing type on the basis of the ascertained graphic information;

comparing the ascertained graphic information to expected graphic information and determining an expected payment for the mailpiece from the comparison, wherein the comparison of the ascertained graphic information to the expected graphic information is carried out in two stages by making a first comparison between the detected graphic information to the expected graphic information by a device in the area of the mail processing station, and if there is a discrepancy between the ascertained graphic information and the expected graphic information in the first comparison, making a second comparison between the ascertained graphic information and the expected graphic information with a specialized reading device associated with a central image processing unit;

identifying at least one of the mailpiece, a mailer, and a recipient's address on the basis of the mailing type;

determining a number of mailpieces processed for the mailer from the identified mailpiece, the mailer, or the recipient's address;

combining the ascertained graphic information from a plurality of mailpieces;

determining a delivery structure from the combination of graphic information;

comparing the number of mailpieces processed for the mailer and the delivery structure to a delivery job batch; and

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comparing the delivery job batch to a customer data record that contains one of a prepaid postage value and a limit postage value;

wherein the delivery job batch is transmitted by a customer or created if a customer does not transmit the delivery job batch.

26. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 25 wherein ~~the step of~~ said ascertaining the graphic information includes ascertaining at least one ~~additional~~ piece of payment-relevant information about the mailpiece.

27. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 25 wherein ~~the step of ascertaining~~ determining the delivery structure includes checking whether the mailpiece was pre-sorted by the mailer.

28. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 27 wherein ~~the step of~~ determining the delivery structure further includes checking whether the pre-sorting was carried out on the basis of addresses of the recipient.

29. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 27 wherein ~~the step of~~ determining the delivery structure further includes checking whether the pre-sorting was carried out on the basis of postal codes of the recipient.

30. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 27 wherein ~~the step of~~ determining the delivery structure further includes checking whether the mailpieces were pre-sorted according to mailing properties.

31.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 27 wherein ~~the step of~~ determining the delivery structure further includes checking whether the pre-sorting was carried out according to one or more size specifications.

32.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 27 wherein ~~the step of~~ determining the delivery structure further includes checking whether the pre-sorting was carried out according to the weight of the mailpieces.

33.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 25 wherein ~~the step of~~ ascertaining the graphic information includes ascertaining an identification number for the mailpiece and invoicing the mailpiece according to the identification number.

34.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 25 wherein ~~the step of~~ ascertaining the graphic information includes ascertaining a customer number for the mailpiece and invoicing the mailpiece according to the customer number.

35.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 25 further including one of ~~the step of~~ ascertaining an invoicing database on the basis of the number of mailpieces processed for the mailer and ~~the step of~~ ascertaining the invoicing database on the basis of the delivery structure.

36.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 25 further including ~~the step of~~ transmitting the delivery job batch to a customer data management system, the customer data management system determining whether there are discrepancies between an invoicing data record and the delivery job batch, and if there are discrepancies, the customer data management system recording the discrepancies in a differential protocol.

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37.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 25 further including ~~the step of~~ checking whether the customer has transmitted the delivery job batch, and if the customer has not transmitted the delivery job batch, generating a delivery job batch automatically.

38.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 25 further including ~~the step of~~ issuing a delivery confirmation to the mailer on the basis of the graphic information.

39.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 38 wherein the delivery confirmation contains one or more components of the delivery structure.

40.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 25 further including checking the authenticity of franking information by using the mailing type, transmitting the mailpieces to a reading device and transmitting the graphic information of each mailpiece, according to the mailing type, to a specialized reading device that checks the authenticity of each particular type of franking.

41.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 40 comprising ascertaining the graphic information is associated with a type of franking ~~by means of~~ <ins>with</ins> an image processing unit.

42.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 40 comprising selecting the specialized reading device as a function of the current capacities of available reading devices.

43.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 25 further including ~~the step of~~ comparing the ascertained graphic information to an expected graphic information and transmitting any differences to a central image processing unit for another comparison.

44.   (Canceled).

45.   (Canceled).

46.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 25 further including ~~the step of~~ transmitting the detected graphic information and any accompanying information to an image processing machine.

47.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46 wherein the accompanying information includes results from comparing the detected graphic information and the expected graphic information.

48.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 25 further including ~~the step of~~ sorting the mailpieces as a function of the detected graphic information.